Health Facts
Personal Hygiene and Dental Care

Introduction
One of the most effective ways we have to protect others and ourselves from illness is good personal hygiene. This means washing your hands, especially, but also your body. It means being careful not to cough or sneeze on others, cleaning things that you touch if you are unwell, putting items such as tissues (that may have germs) into a bin, and using protection (like gloves or condoms) when you might be at risk of catching an infection.

Personal hygiene, such as bathing, is very much dependent on the culture in which you live. In some cultures, it is expected that you will wash your body at least every day and use deodorants to stop body smells. Other cultures have different expectations.

Body Odor
Body smells are caused by a number of factors working in combination, including:
- Chemicals in sweat, including pheromones, which are made by the body and sexually attract (or repel) other people.
- Wastes excreted through the skin, such as metabolized alcohol.
- The actions of bacteria that live on the skin and feed on dead skin cells and sweat.
- Unwashed clothes, such as underwear and socks.

Hand Washing
Most infections, especially colds and gastroenteritis, are caught when we put our unwashed hands, which have germs on them, to our mouth. Some infections are caught when other people's dirty hands touch the food we eat. Hands and wrists should be washed with clean soap and water, using a brush if your fingernails are dirty. Dry your hands with something clean, such as paper towels or hot air dryers.
You should always wash your hands:
- After using the toilet
- Before making or eating food
- After handling dogs or other animals
- If you have been around someone who is coughing or has a cold

Bad Breath
Good dental hygiene includes regular brushing and flossing. Diseases of the teeth, gums and mouth, such as infections, can cause bad breath. Most people have bad breath first thing in the morning because saliva is not made while you're asleep. Some foods that can cause bad breath include garlic and onion. Mouth washes, mouth sprays and flavored chewing gum can make your breath smell better for a while, but if you have a health problem in your mouth, you need to see your dentist.

How can dental decay be prevented?
Dental decay is the most common disease, which affects teeth, but it can be prevented. Decay is caused by plaque which is a sticky film found on teeth. Bacteria found in plaque change sugars into acids, which produce holes (cavities) in the teeth. Plaque cannot be removed by rinsing. Only correct tooth brushing and flossing or cleaning by a dental professional can remove plaque. Fluoridated drinking water and toothpaste has reduced the amount of dental decay.

Plaque also causes Gum Disease
Gum disease is caused by plaque which accumulates on the gum line of teeth. It causes gums to become inflamed. Eventually plaque may destroy the fibers and bone, which hold teeth in place. Regular removal of plaque from teeth by tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste will reduce dental decay and gum disease.

How to prevent decay
To protect your teeth you should:

- Brush teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Reduce snacking on sugary foods and drinks between meals.
- Drink fluoridated tap water.
- Floss teeth daily with dental floss - it reduces the possibility of dental decay between teeth surfaces.
- Regular dental check-ups are important (at least every two years) help to maintain healthy teeth and gums.

When to see a dentist
Regular dental check-ups are important. Also visit a dentist if you have:
- A toothache - this may be caused by dental decay.
- Bleeding gums - this may be caused by gum disease. Some viral infections can also make gums inflamed.
- Dental trauma - a tooth may be loosened or knocked out. If a permanent tooth is knocked out, wrap it in plastic or place it in milk and seek dental advice immediately. It may be possible to put the tooth back.

Things to remember:
Dental decay is caused by plaque. Plaque can be reduced if you brush regularly and reduce sugary snacks between meals. Regular dental checkups are important. Seek dental advice immediately if you have a toothache, bleeding gums or a dislodged tooth.

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Navy Knowledge Online (NKO) at http://www.nko.navy.mil or the
Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC) at http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp.